CALTRANS

# Connection

NEWSLETTER FOR THE WILLITS BYPASS PROJECT FALL 1999

# Alternatives K and K2 for the Willits Bypass Dropped

Two alternatives being studied as potential routes for the Willits Bypass have been dropped from further consideration. The alternatives K and K2, located on the eastern side of the Little Lake Valley (see map inside), were determined to be infeasible and not "practicable". Based on specific studies, Caltrans staff determined neither of these alternatives would be selected as the preferred route for the bypass. The most significant environmental and engineering concerns associated with these alternatives are shown below:

## Reasons for Eliminating Alternatives K and K2

### Alternative K

Cost - $47.8 million over budget.

- Loss of about 86 hectares (212 ac) of oak woodland. Such a loss is difficult to mitigate. Loss of this vegetation also increases the potential for landslide problems (see below).
- Affects 26 cultural resource sites which may be potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP.) Also affects CA-MEN 500, a site already determined eligible for the NRHP.
- Affects 14 buildings that may be historically significant and potentially eligible for the NRHP.
- Located in a landslide area creating future safety and road closure issues. Caltrans geologist recommends moving the alignment out of this area.
- Generates over 14 million cubic meters of excess fill. Disposing of this fill amount will significantly escalate cost and may result in additional environmental impacts depending on the disposal site.

### Alternative K2

- Impacts over 3 million Baker's meadowfoam plants, a species listed as "rare" by the California Native Plant Protection Act.
- Impacts 3 out of 4 populations of Baker's navarretia plants in Little Lake Valley, a sensitive plant species.
- Impacts 23.7 hectares (58.8 ac) of wetlands.
- Affects 11 cultural resource sites which may be potentially eligible for the NRHP. Also affects CA-MEN 500, a site already eligible for the NRHP.
- Located in a landslide area creating future safety and road closure issues. Caltrans geologist recommends moving the alignment out of this area.

MARIA CONTRERAS-SWEET, Secretary
California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency

GRAY DAVIS
Governor

JOSE MEDINA, Director
California Department of Transportation

- Generates over 4 million cubic meters of excess fill. Disposing this amount of fill will escalate cost and may result in additional environmental impacts depending on the disposal site.

Before eliminating these alternatives, Caltrans staff met with the Willits Bypass Technical Advisory Group (a citizens advisory group), the Project Development Team (technical specialists and local government representatives), and resource agencies interested in wetland preservation and fish and wildlife protection. Each group concurred these alternatives should be dropped from further consideration. Additionally, a separate value analysis study of the alternatives conducted by Caltrans staff, concluded the K and K2 alternatives should be dropped.

Eliminating these two alternatives still provides a reasonable range of alternatives (including one no build and five build alternatives) for the public and other governmental agencies to review. We anticipate that once the Draft Environmental Impact Study/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) is complete, comments from the public and other agencies will reveal additional project impacts. Thus, a preferred alternative will not be proposed in the Draft EIS/EIR, but a preferred alternative will be presented in the Final EIS/EIR after all impacts are evaluated. The remaining alternatives and their locations are shown on the study map (shown right).

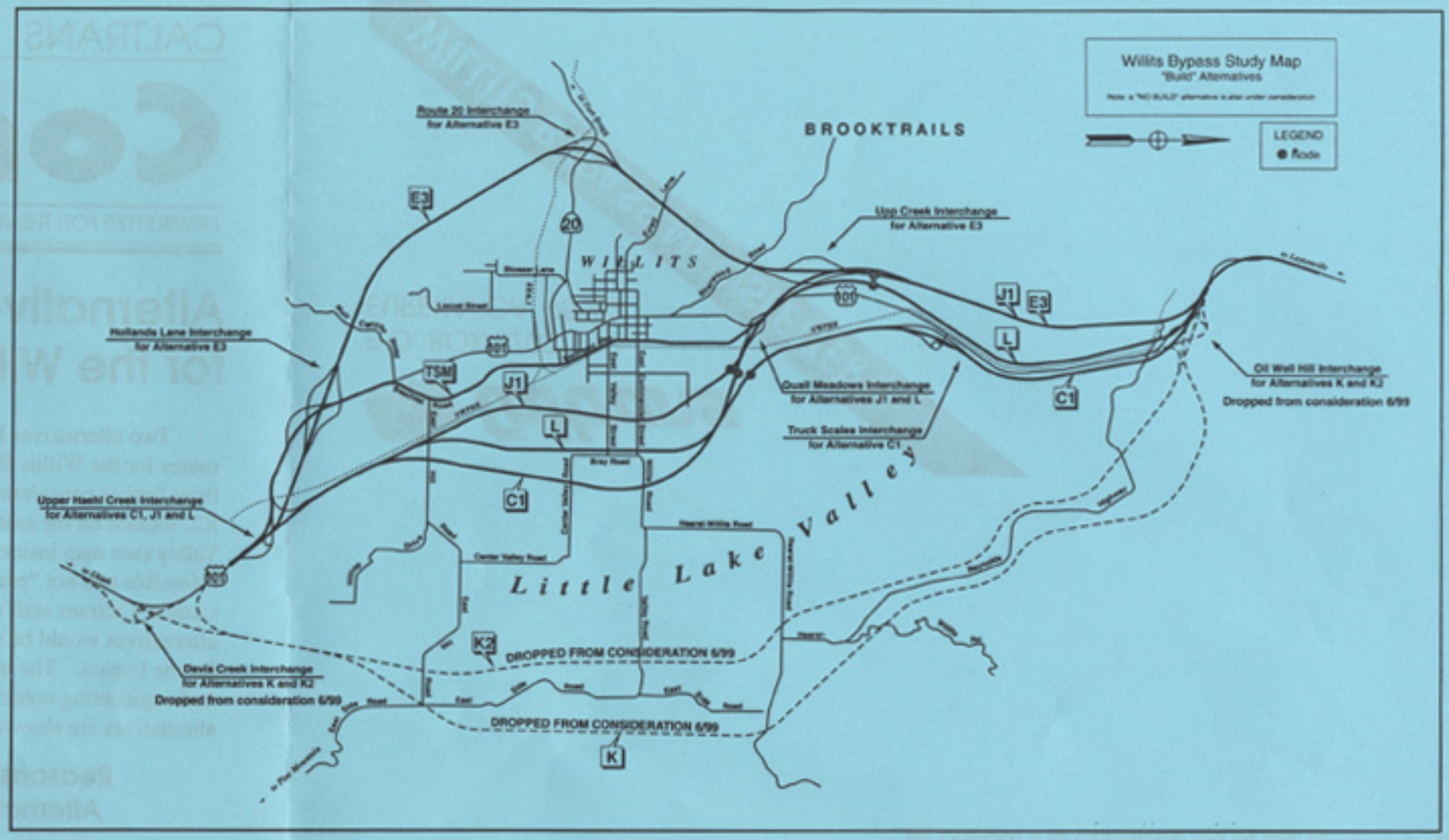
## The Nodal Approach

In eliminating the K and K2 alternatives from consideration as possible routes for the Willits Bypass, the number of alternatives being studied in the environmental document was reduced from eight to six (including the no build alternative). Although fewer alternatives are now being studied, Caltrans staff has developed a procedure to allow reviewers of the environmental document more choices in developing a preferred alternative for the bypass. The procedure to accomplish this is called the "nodal approach".

The nodal approach allows a segment of one alternative to be combined with a segment of another alternative in order to create a new or hybrid alternative. Our nodal approach divides the C1, J1 and E3 alternatives into two parts, and the L alternative into three parts. Since the TSM alternative does not lend itself to being combined with other alternatives it will be unaffected. The study map (shown right) shows where the dividing (or node) point for each alternative is located. To illustrate this concept, Alternative J1 can be considered as a whole or the southern part of Alternative J1 can be combined with the northern part of Alternative L thereby creating a new, or hybrid, alternative.

To implement the nodal approach, the environmental document is being prepared, whenever possible, so that the text will discuss impacts and the tables will display data so that environmental impacts for each segment can be evaluated separately.

This is a new process that we hope builds better flexibility and greater choice into the selection of a preferred alternative.




## What the People Think

In December 1998, Caltrans created a website to keep the public informed about progress on the Willits Bypass. The website can be accessed from a link on the District 1 website at (http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist1/). The Willits Bypass website describes the alternatives, answers frequently asked questions, and allows users to provide "feedback" on the proposed bypass.

The following are samples of comments we have received from the website. In some instances only a portion of the comment is provided because of space limitations. The comments show the diversity of opinions regarding the bypass. Caltrans will select a preferred alternative after comments on the draft environmental document are evaluated.

*"It's nice to see Caltrans keeping the public informed about the bypass. I have lived in Mendocino County for over 35 years and in the Willits area. We . . . . . are concerned about this beautiful valley we all enjoy. We feel that following the existing railroad tracks seems like the most logical route . . . . "*

*"Proposal E-3 is the best alternative to connect the two most populated areas of Mendocino County. As a frequent user of (State Routes) 101 and 20 between Ukiah and Fort Bragg, I would expect this would cut at least 10 minutes of travel time and keep coastal traffic off city streets. The other alternatives will force coastal traffic to continue using the current State Route 101 and will continue to clog the junction of State Route 20."*

*"First, I want to thank the folks at Caltrans for setting up this website, and I hope all concerned citizens will use it constructively. Route J1 or the TSM alternative, in my opinion would provide the most benefit to the business growth of Willits while also providing a solution to the traffic "problem." It would contain the commercial growth near the city limits of Willits where zoning and use regulations can control development so the pastoral Little Lake Valley will remain intact- a place of beauty."*

*"I would like to give my support to option J1. This would keep traffic on one side of the valley. This would also create better egress from the growing Brooktrails Subdivision."*

*"We would like to support Alternative C-1. Not only is it the cheapest, it conforms most closely to existing roadbeds, . . . . . and avoids unnecessary rail crossings. The northern truck scales interchange will stimulate growth on the north end of town, which will balance the growth on the southern end."*

*"I'm no expert, but personally J1, C1, L or E3 all look good to me. Particularly, J1 seems to make the most sense. I am not crazy about the eastern routes (Editor's note: The eastern routes have since been dropped. ) The TSM makes no sense, if you are going to spend tax dollars to fix a major traffic problem. The "No Project" is not acceptable at all."*